

The Payson Roundup

Pine water drowned by community growth

By Jim Keyworth, Roundup staff reporter

Tuesday, December 7, 2004

Pine's overused water supply may soon get much needed relief. A hearing will be held Feb. 14 to determine whether to accept an Arizona Corporation Commission staff recommendation to impose a moratorium on new hookups in the areas serviced by Pine Water Company.

The compliance staff report, issued Nov. 19, depicts a water supply strained by existing customers.

"Staff has determined that the Pine Water's 19-well production source could adequately serve up to 555 service connections during the peak month," the report said. "During the peak month (varying each summer), Pine Water had 1,992 active accounts, consisting of 1,752 accounts that used water and 240 accounts that did not use water."

The report was required as part of the Pine Water Company rate case settlement reached in August. An amendment to that settlement proposed by Commissioner Kristin Mayes and passed unanimously, directed the ACC staff to prepare a report within three months that determines whether a moratorium on new water hookups should be instituted in the Pine Water Company service area.

The report also referenced "a consent order, notice of violations and numerous plant deficiencies," causing the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality to question whether Pine Water Company "is currently delivering water that meets the water quality standards required" by state law.

Pine Water Company officials have not yet responded to a Roundup request for comment on the report's findings. But according to Pine resident John Breninger, a member of the newly-elected Pine-Strawberry Water Improvement District, an attorney for Pine Water Company told the ACC at a Dec. 1 procedural conference that the ADEQ issues would be cleared up by the Feb. 14 hearing.

"We didn't have any details of it. I didn't detect anything major in there," Breninger said, "but whatever they are they're on the record and they need to be cleared."

The Feb. 14 hearing is open to the public with Administrative Law Judge Dwight Nodes presiding, according to Murphy. Motions to intervene must be filed by Jan. 10 and objections to motions to intervene by Jan. 20.

"The judge is not bound to follow the recommendations of staff," Murphy said. "Staff is but one party in an adversarial proceeding and has to put on a convincing case. It will be interesting to see if the county intervenes."

Pine Water Company is currently limited to a maximum of 25 new service connections per month.

Breninger questioned whether a moratorium would make much difference. "It becomes kind of a moot point," he said. "I don't know if during the past year there has been more than 15 houses built, and at the present time there is no one on the waiting list who is ready to build."

Pine has experienced serious water shortages during recent summers, especially during the current drought, requiring water to be trucked in.

Commissioner Bill Mundell has characterized Pine's water woes as the worst the commission has had to deal with in the entire state.

